

# **“IT’S EASTER TODAY AND NEXT SUNDAY”**

Message for *Easter Sunday*

From Pastor Norman Staker

April 5, 2026

**ACTS 10: 34-43 — COLOSSIANS 3: 1-4 — JOHN 20: 1-18**



**GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD  
OUR FATHER AND FROM OUR RISEN,  
YES RISEN, LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS  
CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS  
RISEN INDEED!! AGAIN, HE IS RISEN;  
HE IS RISEN INDEED!!**

When we left here this past Friday, I asked you, ‘How do you celebrate Easter when you’re living Good Friday?’ Then I made the statements that ‘Good Friday will never be as harsh for us as it was the disciples. We know he was resurrected – they did not. Knowing the ending of the story changes the way we receive it. On Good Friday we read scriptures that told of Jesus’ horrible death, and of the efforts on the part of a couple of his friends, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, to secure his body and a proper place of burial. But then again, without Good Friday, we don’t have an Easter.’

So that made me think. Yes, I do that sometimes when I don’t have anything else to do!

You all know how we start the Easter Service “He is Risen! He is Risen indeed!” I struggled with myself just not to say it at the beginning of my message today, to be different but also to be like those disciples who saw him die. But, like I always do and

have done just about every Sunday that we have been together. I decided to do it. But I thought, 'Well we're not going to do that today.' It's my message so if we don't say it, no problem. Of course, we've already done it so it's a moot point.

He was dead! He was dead indeed! They had seen him beaten. They had seen him crucified. They had seen him buried. He was dead! And with him died all of their dreams, all of their hopes, everything they believed in.

They had given everything to this man Jesus, their past, their present even their future, and up until three days ago it seemed like a pretty good bargain. All he had asked was that they have faith in a mystery. And for the most part they did. After all they had seen the impossible. They had seen blind men receive their sight and see again. They had seen lame men walk. The deaf had been made to hear again. They believed with all their hearts in the things they could actually see and they saw a lot of things.

But not any more. Now their beliefs were as dead as their master. There was nothing to do but go home. To leave their hopes, to leave their dreams, and just go home. He was dead!

Our passage today from John begins with an even darker possibility. In the predawn darkness, Mary of Magdala comes sorrowfully to the tomb in order to complete the proper burial duties for Jesus, and discovers the body is gone. Was it true what Mary had seen? She had seen an empty tomb. She had seen unoccupied grave clothes. She had seen two men in dazzling robes asking her "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

If that were the case, then he wasn't dead; he would be alive. If he was alive, then everything was going to be all right! Their hopes and dreams would be restored.

So here's the dilemma we face on this Easter Morning—He is dead! Therefore our beliefs are dead. Our hopes and dreams are shattered and we might as well just go home right now.

Or what Mary reports in today's gospel reading is true. He is risen! He is risen indeed. And everything is going to be all right! Our hopes and dreams can be restored, or resurrected if you may. But Mary Magdalene had been possessed by demons years ago and one of them was alcoholism, maybe she's fallen off the wagon and been drinking again. But Jesus healed her and that was usually good for a person's lifetime.

But you know that the way the whole world is? I read somewhere that 99% of all human beings believe in God or a Higher Power—the other 1% are lying. But when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus, the numbers go down dramatically, and most have their doubts.

What if I told you that today, right here, right now I am going to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. You are going to leave the confines of this building and you will know once and for all, no questions, no doubts. He is risen!!

Welcome to Easter! He is risen! He is risen indeed! But there many distractions. The first distraction happened 2000 years ago when the Pharisees paid the soldiers to deny what they saw with their eyes; they paid them to spread the story that the disciples stole the body.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus was distracted by the betrayal of a friend, In the garden Satan tempted him to avoid the coming pain of the cup of God's wrath. Jesus prayed; "Father for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me." His request received no response. In this clash between his human will and the will of God, Jesus said "not my will but

Yours be done. Jesus resolved to drink the cup of God's wrath and judgment which we deserved. In the first garden he was betrayed with a kiss. In the 2nd garden the stone was rolled away. Easter is about Jesus and His resurrection from death and the grave. "Easter is about Jesus. Easter is about hope. Easter is knowing that death on this earth is not the end of life. Your soul, your spirit, was created by God to live forever. You know it in your soul, in your heart. The Easter event shatters all fear, because the resurrection of Jesus strips Satan of his power to hold people in the fear of death.

The great dividing line in history is not BC/AD but BR/AR-- Before resurrection, After resurrection. If, on this Easter morning you are one who feels unsure about your eternal destiny, and your heart is locked in fear, then hear the truth your soul longs to hear. Jesus is alive! He has risen from the dead! He is the "hope" your heart longs to know.

We all have friends who are grieving over the recent loss of a husband or wife, a child, a parent, a friend. Death came like a ruthless thief, snatching away a treasured presence, leaving only hollow memories in its' wake. This sadness of grief casts a spell of loneliness too powerful for spoken words or shallow songs to break. For those who do not know Jesus..... "hope" is missing.

On a Sunday morning 2000 years ago, the disciples of Jesus were hiding in a locked room. They were distracted, worried about their own arrest, without hope. They were afraid to go out into the streets. Afraid to show their faces There is nothing like the truth of resurrection of Jesus to bring hope back to life.

This is the truth of Easter. This is the truth, this is the message of Easter for those locked behind closed doors, fearful to step into the light of each new day.

**Easter has its own proclamation: "He is not here, He has risen from the dead."**

**Billy Graham wrote: "Without the resurrection, the cross is meaningless."**

**"Without Jesus' death, we have no hope of God's forgiveness; and without Jesus' resurrection, we have no hope of eternal life. Like the two wings of an airplane, both are essential!"**

**Both the cross on which our broken commandments were nailed, and the empty tomb of Jesus have shattered the fear of death. The cross and empty grave remove the wrath of a Holy God from the human heart. Easter celebrates God's dramatic rescue operation giving you and me a righteousness which we could not ourselves earn.**

**Charles Colson, of Watergate fame, in his devotion for Easter reminded us that there will always be those who seek to deny the resurrection: ".....The easiest way to get attention during Easter is to claim the resurrection of Christ was a hoax."**

**Charles Colson said: "Don't hold your breath, Some, like the Pharisees created a distraction by paying soldiers to say the disciples came at night and stole the body of Jesus. Through the centuries others have written books: "The Da Vinci Code"; proposing that the beaten body of Jesus swooned in the cool tomb of stone only to awaken, then marry his sweetheart, Mary Magdalene, and move to France and start a family.**

**The men and women who witnessed the death of Jesus; The Roman soldier who put a spear into the side of Jesus testified that Jesus was dead; those who wrapped his breathless body with a linen shroud; those who rolled the stone to close the**

entrance to the tomb, knew it was watched and sealed by Roman guards. Everyone knew that Jesus was dead and buried.

Listen to the words the angel spoke to the same women who wrapped the broken and dead body of Jesus in a linen shroud. "I know you are seeking Jesus, who was crucified, He is not here, He has risen". "Go and tell his disciples." He is risen! He is risen indeed.

To accept the words of the angel, spoken to these women in the shallows of early morning, or deny the words of the angel is always a choice. To deny the words of the disciples who with their own eyes saw and touched the visible resurrected body of Jesus in the shuttered "Upper Room" is always a choice.

Twelve men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true.

Only the resurrected glorified body of Jesus, risen from the chains of death can provide eternal peace for your soul. Jesus is the truth, the whole truth, the only truth.

The Roman guards knew what their eyes saw. Money was to cause a distraction.

Intuitively you know human death can not destroy your soul. The real you, the soul God gave you at your conception never dies. Only faith in the resurrection of Jesus opens the door to eternal life.

If, on this morning, you chose to deny the resurrection, then I understand the never ending tears, that fall like rain, when you stand at the foot of an open casket.

**On this Easter I know the words of the angel to be true. 'Because Jesus lives I can face tomorrow, no matter the fear of cancer, nor the virus that stalks the streets where I live. Because Jesus rose from the grave with a glorified resurrected body, I know that one day when Jesus returns, I too shall possess a resurrected glorified body, fashioned like His. Do not let the distraction cause you to miss the gretest good news. He is risen! He is risen indeed. Amen.**

**But my friends, we come here today with the Pharisees long dead and gone, with the ancient Greek culture buried in the sands of time, and still proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And we do that, not "according to one person" or "according to opinion" or "according to logic," but we celebrate with joy and proclaim EASTER ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE, that Christ Died For Our Sins.**

**In our world, especially America, we like to highlight differences and celebrate diversity, but this difference between a holy God and sinful man is far from something to appreciate. For the holy God demands that we live up to his holy standards in our every thought, word, and action. And his standard is this: YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I THE LORD YOUR GOD AM HOLY.**

**There was no one. So God sent his own, holy Son into the world to DIE FOR OUR SINS. The Old Testament prophets spelled it out in detail: HE WAS LED LIKE A SHEEP TO THE SLAUGHTER; HE WAS CRUSHED FOR OUR INIQUITIES. ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES, God offered his own Son into death as a perfect sacrifice FOR OUR SINS. His own Son, whom he has loved from eternity far more intensely, far more perfectly than I am able to love my children. And the Son agreed willingly to sacrifice himself because he loved his Father, and because he loved us.**

**Who on Good Friday believed it? How loving, how powerful, how victorious did the corpse of Jesus of Nazareth look as it**

hung there, bloodied and beaten, nailed to a tree?

It didn't. And so two of his followers took down his cold, lifeless body and wrapped it for permanent burial in the tomb. The rest of his followers were hiding, thinking they were next.

And ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES, Christ rose because he is the God of the Living, not the dead. Confucious is dead. Mohammed is dead. Buddha is dead. Aristotle is dead. Mary Baker Eddy is dead. Ralph Waldo Emerson is dead. Charles Taze Russell is dead. Joseph Smith and Brigham Young are dead. Shirley McClaine isn't dead yet, but eventually she will be.

Every leader of human religion is dead. But Jesus Christ is alive forever and ever.

For how easily Christian churches can be distracted, and burdened down by the cares of the world and the work that has to be done. How easy a thing it is for a church to spend all its time feeding the poor, housing the homeless, debating "abortion", denouncing "racism" etc. etc. And those are good things. They need to be done and the church needs to do them.

But of FIRST IMPORTANCE we must continue to declare forgiveness of sins through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That alone can change peoples lives, and give them the greatest help and hope. That alone can change hearts, and when it does, it will change behavior.

It is Easter today and next Sunday and the next and the next!

Jesus Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!!.

**Hallelujah and Amen!!**